

Statement of

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA

Submitted By

The

VVA National Task Force on Homeless Veterans

Presented By

Richard Weidman

Director of Government Relations

Before the

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Regarding

H.R. 2716, the "Homeless Veterans Assistance Act of 2001"

And

H.R. 936 the "Heather French Henry Homeless Veterans

Assistance Act"

September 20, 2001

Mr. Chairman, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is the only congressional chartered Veterans Service Organization whose committee, the National Task Force on Homeless Veterans, are on the front line every day assisting the needs of homeless veterans. VVA applauds this committee for its attention to the plight of our homeless veterans. We are hopeful that this, and previous testimony will produce positive outcomes, without lengthy delay, in advancing assistance to them. Without dispute, we all recognize that veterans make up a significant percentage of the general homeless population and VVA appreciates the opportunity to testify before this committee regarding H.R. 2716 and H.R. 936.

RESPONSIBILITY OF FEDERAL AGENCIES

H.R.2716, Section 2: Sense of Congress Regarding Homeless Veterans and the Responsibility of Federal Agencies, whereby federal agencies, particularly the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) should cooperate more fully to address the problem of homelessness among veterans, VVA believes this is a necessary and vital first step in the process of coordinating homeless veteran programs at the federal level.

HUD has to date, not set aside funds designated for homeless veterans, nor has it shown a clear linkage of funding to that of the VA Homeless Grant & Per Diem Program. HUD has not carved out dollars that will easily bind with VA dollars for homeless veteran housing/assistance programs. How ironic it is that HUD has designed its McKinney grants under metropolitan consolidated plans that essentially have eliminated transitional housing from its considered recipients...and the VA cannot offer anything else but transitional housing in its grants. Is this cooperation? Is this a workable fit? Matching dollars are required for these federal grants and without a fit and link of grants, non-profit agencies are often unable to locate the money for this match. Respectfully, VVA urges this committee to communicate with HUD, requesting HUD to address its responsibility to cooperate with the VA. VVA seeks to have assurance and asks this committee to ensure that HUD designate a reasonable portion of its Homeless dollars to veteran specific programs. The link of HUD homeless veteran specific dollars to those of the VA, will thereby consolidate funding and make a more efficient and effective utilization of Federal dollars. VVA also believes that Department of Labor (DOL) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) likewise operate programs for homeless veterans and should also be held accountable for programs that they administer to assist homeless veterans.

Section 3 Improvement and Consolidation of Provision of Law Relating to Homeless Veterans

Section 2012 Per Diem Payments - VVA believe that an increase in the per diem rate given to VA Homeless Grant recipients must be increased for residential programs from \$19/day/veteran to that amount equal to the rate given by the VA to the State

Veteran Nursing Homes. Furthermore, VVA supports the elimination of a match requirement in order to receive such per diem. VVA believes with the inspection and reporting system required by the VA, grant recipients are appropriately monitored and evaluated on performance. With the cost of operating a program in today's economy, one would be hard pressed to believe any non-profit is making a profit on the per diem payment received from the VA. Additionally, there must be consideration of the added expense to the VA, annually, in reviewing these budget submissions, from an increasing number of grant programs.

If we look at the outline of criteria for homeless veteran service centers as set forward in H.R.2716, and then at the VA per diem rate presently given to Homeless Veteran Service Centers, one can understand why so few have been established. The current rate is \$1.10 per half hour of service provided to a homeless veteran while he or she is on location. A quick review of the level of service provided by these centers will obviously reflect the level of, not only manpower, but professional staff required to deliver comprehensive service. Additionally, the delivery of service continues long after the veteran has left the premises. Case management and the coordination of services, to include outside agencies, extends far beyond the time that the homeless veteran is on site at the service center location. A more reasonable and equitable per diem rate must be considered if service centers are to exist and function as an integral component to a continuum of service delivery with effective outcomes.

(2) The rate for such per diem payment shall be the rate applicable for domiciliary care under section 1741(a)(1)(A) - VVA supports this portion of the bill this would eliminate the match requirement for grants and increase per diem to grantees equalized to state veterans' home to support domiciliary care.

(b) In-Kind Assistance - VVA supports this part of the bill, however, the VA must make certain that services provided to the veterans by employees of the VA are at the highest standard of care.

Section 2013 Authorization of Appropriations -VVA supports increase appropriation funding for the program but is quite puzzled as to why the administration would refer to previous appropriation years when clearly the impact will be on FY02 or FY03 funding?

Section 2021 Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) - VVA supports the measure of the bill requiring monitoring of expenditures of funds by the Department of Labor. For far too long DOL has been disbursing monies for homeless veteran programs. However, to date has never provided accurate data to support those programs. VVA also supports the increased appropriation for the VETS program run by the Department of Labor. VVA is again unsure why the administration again refers to FY00 and FY01 dollars when clearly the impact will be on FY02 or FY03 funding if this bill passes thru Congress.

Section 4 Rental Assistance Voucher for HUD Veterans Affairs Supported Housing Program - VVA is not quite sure the intent of this section of the bill since the VA has

continually testified before Congress that it is not a housing agency. Vouchers are greatly needed and can be very effective, however, the homeless veteran usually has to go thru the VA transitional program to be eligible and not a community based transitional program. VVA request more clarity from the committee before supporting this portion of the bill.

Section 5 Increase in Representative Payee Services for Homeless Veterans - VVA supports Section 2035 of the bill as long the VHA maintain an accurate system in place that would ensure the homeless veterans government funds are administered for the health and welfare of the veteran and not fraudulently used by the representative payee.

Section 6 Joint Methodology to Monitory Results of Services Furnished to Homeless Veterans - VVA does not support this measure of the bill, as the language is to vague to explain intent. VVA requests a more detail explanation from the committee because it is within the VA's own selection committee that these grantees are selected. Why not get it right the first time and use this money for other much needed homeless programs

Section 7 Enhanced –Use Leases for Facility that Serve Homeless Veterans - VVA support this portion of the bill.

Section 8 Authorization of Additional Domiciliary Care Programs - Last fiscal year, VA reported an increase of 26% in the number of veterans who are homeless. This number included veterans who received care in a VA program specifically designed for specialized programs including substance abuse treatment and the Domiciliary Care Program. The reduction in funding for treatment of SMI veterans who are homeless can be directly linked to the reduction in funding for substance treatment programs. In other r words, the VA has been creating homeless veterans faster than the Congress can devise, pass, and fund new programs to help reduce homelessness among veterans. It is time that all concerned recognize this fact. VVA does not support this potion of the bill and believes that domiciliary programs located within various medical centers throughout the VA system have proven costly. As stand-alone programs, they do not display a high rate of success. During this time of fiscal restraints, programs assisting homeless veterans need to show a cost/benefit ratio in order to survive. VVA also believe that if additional domiciliary care programs are indeed established they need to link directly with community based operations which have been proven to be more cost efficient and beneficial to the homeless veteran.

Section 9 Demonstration program relating to referral and counseling for Veterans Transitioning from certain Institutions who are risk for homeless - VVA support this portion of the bill.

Section 10 Demonstration Program for Grants for Independent Group Homes for Recovering Veterans – VVA feels the DVA already has providers performing the services outlined in the Demonstration Program. The DVA should research these

programs. It would be reasonable to allot this money to expanding these programs to meet such unmet needs of veterans as long-term care, low-cost permanent housing, and assistance for veterans with families.

Additional Comments

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) also supports the establishment of a VA Homeless Veterans Advisory Committee, whose membership would be appointed by The Secretary and comprised of members of veteran service organizations, advocates of homeless veterans, community based homeless veteran service providers, specialized homeless providers, and others as appropriate. VA employees would only serve in a capacity of advisors or ex-officio members to the committee. This committee would serve to advise the Secretary on homeless veteran issues and concerns, providing oversight to VA homeless veteran programs

H.R. 936 - The Heather French Henry Homeless Veterans Assistance Act Of 2001

Because DVA has been providing limited funding to non-DVA providers of service to homeless veterans since 1994, except for 1999, funding nationally never exceeded \$6 million each year and was limited to "bricks and mortar" costs. A "*Per Diem Only*" grant cycle was funded in 2000.

The needs of homeless veterans, now estimated to total 341,000 nationally, have been identified in federal legislation entitled "*The Heather French Henry Homeless Veterans Assistance Act Of 2001*" (H.R. 936), introduced 8 March 2001 by U.S. Representative Lane Evans of Illinois, Ranking Democrat on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. The following are VVA's comments on each section of the proposed legislation:

I. Requires annual meetings for Inter-agency Council on Homelessness

VVA agrees with this provision. The Council has been dormant for a number of years and has the potential for use as a clearinghouse of timely information to providers and agencies that wish to become providers.

II. Establishment of a VA Homeless Veterans Advisory Committee

- A. Advises Secretary of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
- B. Secretary shall appoint members of veterans service organizations, advocates of homeless veterans and other homeless people, community-based providers, specialized homelessness service providers, previously homeless veterans, and others as appropriate
- C. Reports annually to congressional Committees on Veterans Affairs

VVA agrees with this provision. Currently, there is no mechanism for direct interface with VA concerning non-VA homeless program providers.

III. Evaluation Component

- A. VA shall support the continuation of evaluation centers which monitor the structure, process, and outcome of VA homeless programs.
- B. Provide annual reports to Congress on Health Care for Homeless Veterans Programs.

VVA agrees with this provision because input from NEPEC has proven to be essential.

IV. Changes in Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA)

- A. Designates care provided to veterans enrolled in several VA programs as "complex care" and thus subject to reimbursement associated with that designation.
- B. Ensure that funds for any new programs for homeless veterans are designated as special purpose (non-modeled) funding for 3 years after initiation of the program.

VVA agrees with this provision due to the complexity of the issues facing homeless veterans and those programs seeking to assist their return to productive life in the community.

V. Create a \$5 million Homeless "Special Needs" Grant Program

- A. Encourage development of providers targeted at special needs within the homeless veterans' populations (such as programs for elderly, substance abusers, PTSD, terminally ill, chronically mentally ill, dual diagnosis, women, etc.)
- B. Study of outcome effectiveness: compare veterans' outcomes in such areas as veteran satisfaction, health status, reduction in addiction severity, housing, engagement in productive activity to those of similar veterans in programs that meet the general needs of homeless veterans.

VVA agrees with this provision. The "special needs" of the homeless veterans' population have grown more complex and at times overwhelm the service delivery systems established to serve this population.

VI. Joint Mental Health/Readjustment Counseling Service Initiative: Coordinated strategy to outreach to veterans at risk of homelessness (discharges from institutional inpatient psychiatric care, substance abuse treatment programs, prisons, jails)

- A. Mentoring programs/support Networks
- B. Family support
- C. Appropriate referrals within Department of Veterans Affairs and community
- D. Case management

VVA agrees with this provision because it will permit a closer coordination between those agencies with day-to-day contact with homeless veterans, especially those facing imminent homelessness.

VII. Create an Integrated Mental Health Services Delivery Center of Excellence

- A. Request for application process for delivery models that integrate mental health, substance abuse and medical components
- B. Appropriate \$1 million/each in start up funds associated for three models: Mental Health Primary Care Teams, Patient Assignment to mental health primary care team linked with primary care team, and Mental Health Participants on Medical Primary Care Teams
- C. Compare outcomes of chronically mentally ill veterans in integrated mental health programs to similar chronically mentally ill veterans treated in models that employ traditional consultative relationships
- D. Dissemination of results through reports to Congress and sharing "best practices" nationwide.

VVA agrees with this provision. The proposal will permit additional resources to be accessed for programs assisting homeless veterans.

VIII. Expansion of Authority for Dental Care - Applies to PRIORITY 5 veterans receiving care in domiciliary, therapeutic residencies, VA-coordinated community residential care or veterans for whom VA finances care in homeless grant and per diem providers.

VVA disagrees with this provision, largely due to cost.

IX. Programmatic Expansions - Extend transitional housing (grant and per-diem) program to Dec. 31, 2006 and extend the Comprehensive Homeless Program through Dec. 31, 2006

VVA agrees with this provision because it will expand and enhance the non-VA service delivery system assisting homeless veterans.

X. Various Authorities - Authorize greater cooperation between existing VA and community-based homeless veterans programs.

VVA agrees with this provision because it will permit a closer coordination between those agencies with day-to-day contact with homeless veterans, especially those facing imminent homelessness.

XI. Create a Life Safety Code for Homeless Grant and Per Diem Providers - VVA agrees with this provision. Currently, non-VA programs are at the mercy of local code

officials in the process of gaining certificates of occupancy for localized programs that are intended to assist homeless veterans.

XII. Authorize VA to create Temporary Assistance Grants - Eligibility: Homeless veterans or at-risk veterans who have received less than marginal income for preceding month. Veteran must have either served during a period of war or have completed the period of service for which the veteran enlisted or was called to active duty, unless discharged due to a disability incurred or aggravated in line of duty. Note: No disability requirement.

VVA disagrees with this provision, largely due to the possibility for waste, fraud and abuse.

XIII. Emergency Homeless Grants - Eligibility: Homeless veterans who have a housing emergency, such as having missed previous month's rent, security deposit, utility deposit or cleaning deposit. Veteran must have either served during a period of war or have completed the period of service for which the veteran enlisted or was called to active duty, unless discharged due to a disability incurred or aggravated in line of duty. Note: No disability requirement.

VVA disagrees with this provision, largely due to the possibility for waste, fraud and abuse.

XIV. Technical Assistance Grants - Grants totaling \$750,000 to be awarded for FY 2001-2006 for providing technical assistance to homeless veterans service providers. Grant recipient(s) would give assistance with building the capacity of other service providers to meet the needs of veterans to help them transition out of homelessness.

VVA agrees with this provision, since it will allow established programs assisting homeless veterans to share with "start-up" programs the benefit of their experiences.

XV. Manufactured Housing Loans - Remove land requirement for manufactured housing - land plats are no longer required for loan eligibility for this type of purchase.

VVA agrees with this provision because it will eliminate one more hurdle in the providing additional, low-cost housing to formerly homeless veterans who wish to settle in a community.

XVI. Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Expansion - Increase the annual authorization for the Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) to \$75 million for fiscal years 2002 through 2006.

VVA agrees with this provision because HVRP has proven its worth over the past ten years.

In summation, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), urges the proposed changes noted by the US House of Representatives to H. R. 936 for an early vote.

In Conclusion

VVA believes that it is essential to provide additional funding sources to community based veteran service providers and local chapters or posts of national veterans group that are providing essential and desperately needed services in a holistic manner to veterans who are homeless or at significant risk of being homeless. VVA also thanks the committee for finally bringing homeless veterans issues to the front burner, however, is quite puzzled at the political implications that have somehow attached itself to this issue.

It is important that the leadership of both houses somehow set aside their differences and come together for a more meaningful solution that would provided a better way of life for those men and women who served this country. As each day passes these homeless men and women continue to struggle with daily existence and the burden of these endless day to them can mean life itself.

Mr. Chairman this concludes the testimony of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). I will be more than happy to answer any question that the committee may have.

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA
Funding Statement
September 20, 2001**

The national organization Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is a non-profit veterans membership organization registered as a 501(c)(19) with the Internal Revenue Service. VVA is also appropriately registered with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of Representatives in compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995.

VVA is not currently in receipt of any federal grant or contract, other than the routine allocation of office space and associated resources in VA Regional Offices for outreach and direct services through its Veterans Benefits Program (Service Representatives). This is also true of the previous two fiscal years.

For Further Information, Contact:

Director of Government Relations
Vietnam Veterans of America.
(301) 585-4000, extension 127

RICHARD WEIDMAN

Richard Weidman serves as Director of Government Relations on the National Staff of Vietnam Veterans of America. He served as a 1-A-O Army Medical Corpsman during the Vietnam war, including service with Company C, 23rd Med, AMERICAL Division, located in I Corps of Vietnam in 1969.

Mr. Weidman was part of the staff of VVA from 1979 to 1987, serving variously as Membership Service Director, Agency Liaison, and Director of Government Relations. He left VVA to serve in the Administration of Governor Mario M. Cuomo (NY) as Director of Veterans Employment & Training for the New York State Department of Labor.

He has served as Consultant on Legislative Affairs to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, and served at various times on the VA Readjustment Advisory Committee, the Secretary of Labor's Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment & Training, the President's Committee on Employment of Persons with Disabilities on Disabled Veterans, Advisory Committee on veterans' entrepreneurship on the Small Business Administration, and numerous other advocacy posts in veteran affairs.

Mr. Weidman was an instructor and administrator at Johnson State College (Vermont) in the 1970s, where he was also active in community and veteran affairs. He attended Colgate University B.A., (1967), and did graduate study at the University of Vermont.

He is married and has four children.